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Supervised by: **ABDUL MALIK MUJAHID**

P.O. Box: 22743, Riyadh 11416 K.S.A. Tel: 00966-01-4033962/4043432 Fax: 4021659

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New York-11217, Tel: 001-718-625 5925

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Prophet Muhammad

as a

Teacher

**With a non evaluative
comparison of
Jesus , as a Teacher**

Dr. S. Dawood Shah



Dedicated
to

My Father

My First Teacher

Who initiated me in the Process of Education

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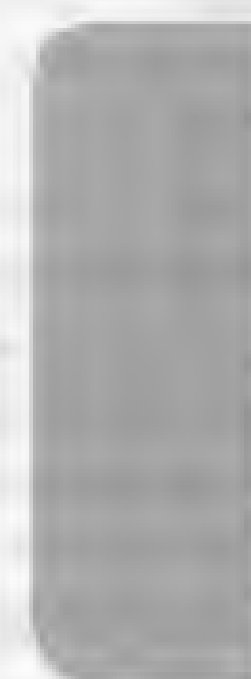
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PREFACE



Why Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of God be upon him) was chosen as the Subject of this Book.

"We have sent among you a Messenger of your own, rehearsing to you Our signs, and purifying you, and instructing you in Scripture and wisdom, and in new knowledge." – The Qur'an 2: 151

Muhammad was a great Prophet and a teacher. The Qur'an proclaims that he was chosen by Almighty Allah as a mercy to all creation (21: 107), an excellent exemplar (33: 21) who possessed an exalted standard of character and the last and final Messenger to all humankind (33: 40; 34: 28) He successfully taught and conveyed the Message of Allah to the people of

Arabia and thereby transformed the pagans of the entire Arabian Peninsula into staunch believers in the unity of Allah within twenty three years of his own lifetime. Even though he was chased out of his hometown Makkah as an outcast, he established a state in Madinah and returned to Makkah to conquer it peacefully. The after-effects of his Prophetic vision and teachings contributed to the emergence of a new world order and civilization that changed the course of history. This book mainly deals with a study of Prophet Muhammad as a teacher.

Unlettered Prophet's Efforts in Education

It looked as if Prophet Muhammad shared a passion for teaching and his contribution to education is in no way less than his contribution to any other field of human activity. His conscious and sincere efforts and strategy to change the educational, social and ethical scenario of Arabia completely and develop it into a country that follows a monotheistic religion, free from the barbaric practices of the "Period of Ignorance" are undertakings that merit study. Further, his realization that the society could be changed only through education and hence his exhortation to his Companions – both men and women – to acquire knowledge compulsorily became the basis of his mission.

The prime theme of his teaching revolved around "Faith in One God" which he firmly believed could lead human beings to submit themselves to the Will of Allah through their right actions. However, man is accountable for his actions the result of which will be declared on the Day of Judgment. Therefore, "Righteous Action of man" and "The Day of Judgment" that blossomed out of the main theme formed his secondary themes. Having these great themes in mind, the Prophet started setting his goals to action. This was followed by motivating both men and women to

seek knowledge, starting schools in Madinah, appointing teachers, developing a religious and secular curriculum, arranging supervisors and inventing strategies to promote literacy, which indicates his systematic approach to education.

Some of his methodologies were unique in nature that worked wonders not only in the spiritual field but also in the field of acquiring knowledge. This research work has identified 22 teaching methods of the Prophet which are classified under five broader topics such as "Developing Basic Skills", "Scientific Methods", "Psychological Approach", "Methods of 'Mass' Communication" and "Techniques of Teaching". Withstanding the great temptations on him by his community the Quraish to give up his teaching, he was firm in his belief and led his mission that bore fruit during his lifetime and in the immediate posterity.

These educational endeavours of Prophet Muhammad revolutionized the life and attitude of the Arabs and they became the torchbearers of a new civilization, developed the skills to lead, acquired the newfound divine knowledge to guide themselves and others and spread the cause of education far and wide. The Companions of the Prophet became great teachers, established schools everywhere, not only developed literacy but kindled the thirst for knowledge. Within a hundred years after the passing of the Prophet, his message had touched the hearts and lives of millions in Africa, Asia and parts of Europe. The world of Islam became the abode of education for the whole world with universities, science laboratories, hospitals and libraries that sprang up everywhere contributing to the spread of knowledge in that part of the world. The paradox was that all these efforts came from a simple, unlettered man.

A Humble Teacher with a Multifaceted Personality

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (1984, p.389) refers to Muhammad as the most successful of religious personalities of the world who changed the course of human history. His words and deeds are being followed by one fourth of the world's population. Besides being a teacher, he was a multifaceted personality who played various roles such as educationist, social reformer, lawgiver, moral guide, political leader, statesman, able administrator, strategist and military commander – all in one. Muhammad accomplished so much, in such diverse fields of human thought and behaviour, in a limited period of time. He established laws protecting animals, trees and the environment. He encouraged free trade and lawful investments but secured workers' rights and forbade usury. He worked for peace, but defined the parameters of the judicious use of force, when force was needed. He convinced people to give up alcohol, drugs, prostitution, infanticide and crime and promoted healthy living. He condemned domestic violence; encouraged his wives to speak their own mind and granted Muslim women many rights not dreamed of in Europe until centuries later, including the right to own property, reject arranged marriages and seek divorce because of incompatibility. Thus, *"He succeeded, both as prophet and as reformer"* (Farah, 1968, p. 37). Again, while other men would have been corrupted by the absolute power that he wielded in his later days, Muhammad remained humble, ever aware of the source of his blessings. "I am just Allah's servant", he said, "And I have been only sent as a Teacher."

He naturally had the qualities required for a teacher. Every detail of his private and public life, of his actions and utterances, has been accurately documented and faithfully preserved to our day. The authenticity of the information so preserved is vouched for not only by faithful followers

but also by unbiased critics and open-minded scholars. Hence, the famous historian Gibbon is quoted as follows. "The good sense of Muhammad despised the pomp of royalty. The Apostle of God submitted to the menial offices of the family; he kindled the fire; swept the floor; milked the cows and mended with his own hands his shoes and garments. Disdaining the penance and merit of a hermit, he observed without effort of vanity the abstemious diet of an Arab." (Gibbon, 1823, quoted by Zahoor and Haq, 1997)

A Successful Teacher

Within a period of twenty-three years, the Prophet was able to completely transform the attitude, mentality, mindset, customs, traditions, values and culture of the people of Arabia basically by his teaching. Learning became a part of every Muslim's life and many of the Prophet's Companions became great teachers. Muslims never experienced a conflict between science and religion and led the world in many fields of learning for centuries afterwards. Following the counsels of the Prophet, a new revolution dawned among the early Muslims and they mastered various arts and became pioneers in many branches of learning. The Qur'anic verse (which means): *"O Lord, Increase me in knowledge"* became a standard prayer of many believing Muslims all over the world. The Prophet accomplished all this through the strength of his character and personal example; he inspired in his followers a love, devotion and sense of awe that was unparalleled. Michael H. Hart in his book *The 100 – A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*, opines thus: "My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels." (1978, p.33)

are twenty-two methods cited here which are unique in their own respect. He also paid special emphasis to the basic methods of learning namely: Reading, Writing and Speaking.

The fifth chapter talks about the effects of Prophet Muhammad's teaching. This is analysed by comparing the social, economic, religious and educational conditions of Arabia before, during and after his teaching career.

The overall summary and conclusion form the sixth chapter.

I thank Almighty Allah for giving me the opportunity to write a book focusing on the contribution of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in the field of education and his prominent role as a teacher. I thank my teacher Prof. Dr. Raja Ganesan for his guidance right from the inception of my research work until to-day. My profound appreciation and thanks to Prof. U. Muhammad Iqbal for his meticulous correction of my work both objectively and otherwise. This study is offered as a humble contribution towards inspiring teachers in our educational institutions today.

S. Dawood Shah

1

Chap.

THE CONCEPT OF PROPHETHOOD

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels; "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood while we celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what you know not"¹

ORIGIN, SOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT

There is no historical evidence on the establishment of prophethood or the first Prophet; for this, we have to depend heavily on theological sources like the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible and the Qur'an. Some scholars have suggested that prophecy originated on the periphery of Mesopotamia, in Canaan, or even in Egypt and then was borrowed by the Israelites². Historically the most outstanding and influential prophetic phenomenon in the milieu and tradition of the western culture was Israelite prophecy

1 The Qur'an 2: 30

2 Wilson, 2002, p.827

with its literature drawn from Biblical material³. Thus, it may be assumed that the origin of the prophetic tradition begins with Israelite prophecy and the history of Jews goes back about 4000 years.

According to Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God in the beginning created man in the likeness of His own image (*"Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves..."*)⁴ and appointed him as His representative on earth. (*"Behold, thy Lord said to the angels; 'I will create a vicegerent on earth'..."*)⁵. Thus Adam, the first man, became the Prophet of God and God taught him everything. (*"And He taught Adam the names of all things..."*)⁶

Having created humankind through Adam and Eve, God out of his mercy wanted to guide humanity and selected the most perfect human beings among the descendants of Adam as His Prophets. He took a covenant from them that they would propagate His message. Then the Creator sent a succession of Prophets to guide nations and tribes to the worship of the one true God, to remind people of the bounties that they had forgotten and to demand of them that they fulfill their primordial covenant with God.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PROPHETIC TRADITIONS IN WORLD RELIGIONS

Israelite Prophecy

"Genesis" the first book of "The Pentateuch" a collection of the first five books of the Bible, sets the history of the Prophets in a background of primordial history. The early chapters visualize the situation in which Adam and Eve disobeyed the command of the Lord, the nemesis of which brought the great flood during Noah's time as a punishment. The repopulation of the earth starts with Noah, but our attention is directed ultimately to Abraham, father

3 Werblowsky, 1971, p.634

4 Genesis 1:26

5 The Qur'an 2:30

6 The Qur'an 2:31

of the three great faiths namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. After "Genesis" the three books namely, "Exodus", "Leviticus" and "Numbers" have their common framework in the life of Moses. The Old Testament collection entitled the "Latter Prophets" by the latter Jewish community contains a massive body of prophetic literature preserved under the names of 15 individual prophets. The four "Major Prophets" (distinguished only for the great lengths of their books) are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel and the rest are called "Minor Prophets". All the prophetic books appear to have undergone a process of editing and addition of materials. Therefore, it may not be possible to recover the exact words of the prophets.

"The Talmud", a collection of Jewish religious writings, says that there had been twice as many Prophets as the number of people who left Egypt, but only those whose messages were for future generations were recorded. As per this account, there were 48 male and 7 female prophets⁷.

Further in the ancient world their work centered around prediction of the future and delivery of oracles as a part of the rituals on the occasion of great festivals. Prophets also accompanied the kings in battle, giving them guidance from God. They were also closely related to the Israelite cultic practices. They stood against established religious traditions and customs and brought the divine Word of Judgment against all efforts on the part of the community to secure its life by merely external or cultic means⁸.

In the Deuteronomistic history and literature Prophets were accorded high status and played an authoritative role in Israel's religious life⁹. They were called "visionaries" during the monarchical period¹⁰. Some of them were members of the royal establishment

7 Soc. Culture. Jewish News Groups, Last modified 24, October, 2005, www.scjfaq.org/faw/12-11.html

8 Werblowsky, 1971, p. 635

9 Deut.18:9-22

10 ca. 1004- 586 B.C

burden of heavy stones, tossed on embers, sometimes tied to the legs of two different camels that were chased apart to tear their bodies to pieces. The Prophet besides meeting them secretly even advised some to seek asylum in Ethiopia.

Having found that all their attempts to subjugate Muhammad had failed, the pagans of Makkah decided to impose a social boycott upon all the followers and the supporting tribes of Muhammad, which lasted for three years. The Prophet and the early Muslims withdrew to a valley when the food supply was completely cut; they had to survive by eating leaves and skins of animals. The deaths of Abu Talib, the uncle of the Prophet and of Khadijah, the Prophet's wife,, who were a great source of strength to the Prophet were a great loss to the Prophet who announced that period as the Year of Grief and Mourning.

The Call Beyond Makkah (620 CE)

Having decided to propagate his faith beyond Makkah, the Prophet made a visit to Ta'if where he was chased and pelted with stones. Unrelenting, he began meeting various tribes during their pilgrimage to Makkah. Even though it did not yield any desired result in the beginning, the meeting with Khazraj and Aws tribes of Madinah in the eleventh year of the prophethood resulted in the entire city of Madinah accepting the message of the Prophet. This was a simple example to show that universal teachers would not give up their mission until they achieve the desired result.

The Ascension (Al – Mi'raj) (621 CE)

During the last phase of the Makkan period, the Prophet claimed that he had undertaken a miraculous journey from Makkah to the farthest mosque in Jerusalem and thereafter ascended to the heavens to meet God. He was then presented to the Lord's presence and experienced the Divine glory. There he was instructed to observe prayer five times a day. He was given an opportunity to have a glimpse of Heaven and Hell. Then he was sent back to Makkah to the place where he was sleeping – all these events

happened overnight. This journey is referred as "*Mi'raj*" and it is mentioned in the Qur'an⁹⁹.

The Aqaba Pledge (621 & 622 CE)

The following year twelve people of Madinah met the Prophet during the pilgrimage and took an oath before the Prophet that they would follow his teachings. This was followed by another seventy from Madinah the next year, who pledged to the Prophet, that besides following his teachings, they would defend him too. This second pledge of Aqabah gave a sense of strength to the hitherto weak Makkan Muslims.

The Emigration to Madinah (The Hijrah) (622 CE)

The Aqabah pledge gave an opportunity to the affected and ill-treated Muslims to migrate to Madinah with the permission of the Prophet. Within two months the entire Muslim community of Makkah migrated to Madinah, 447 km away. In the meantime, An-Nadwah, the parliament of the Quraish, was convened to decide unanimously to kill the Prophet. On the same night, the Prophet's house was surrounded by his enemies, who were waiting for him to come out. Having sensed the problem, the Prophet left the house by the grace of God and left for Madinah in the company of his trusted friend Abu-Bakr. They hid themselves in the cave of Thawr for three days while the Makkans announced a reward of 100 camels to anyone who found the Prophet or killed him. However, the Prophet with his companion reached Madinah after a journey of twelve days where they were given a rousing welcome. This event is known as the *Hijrah* ('emigration, 'departure', 'expulsion', or 'flight'). The Hijri calendar began theoretically on Friday, July 16, 622 CE and was implemented by Caliph Umar on July 9, 638 CE. It has been the most authentic calendar of the Muslim world¹⁰⁰.

The Makkan period is a worthy example to study the plight of a

99 The Qur'an 17:1

100 Hijazi, 1994, p.3

eager to acquire knowledge and posed a number of questions to clarify their doubts whenever the Prophet taught them.

Universal Call

After his victory over Makkah, he gave instructions to officers appointed by him and his governors. He assumed the larger role of an educator. He also conveyed the message to ambassadors of other countries. He sent messages to the kings beyond Arabia calling them to his faith. Deputations and messengers were sent to several heads of state: Negus, the King of Abyssinia; the Vicegerent of Egypt called Muqawqas; Chosroes, Emperor of Persia; the Envoy to Caesar, King of Rome; Mundhir bin Sawa, Governor of Bahrain; Haudha bin 'Ali, Governor of Yamama; Harith bin Abi Shamir Al-Ghassani, King of Damascus and to the King of Oman, Jaifer and his brother 'Add Al-Jalandi¹⁹⁷.

SETTINGS

Milieu

Muhammad taught under an all-Arab milieu that consisted of Arabic speaking polytheists, Jews, Christians and pagans.

Variety of Settings

Muhammad did not confine himself to a classroom to teach; rather he was found teaching not only in the places of worship but in virtually every other public place. He began teaching by providing a feast to the invitees at his home and later continued his teachings in private homes. Once, in the earlier days of the call to Islam, he called out to people from Mount As-Safa and later because of brutal persecution, he taught his Companions in secret in a place called Dar Al-Arqam near Mount As-Safa. After the Conquest of Makkah, he addressed a great gathering of pilgrims in a vast open space called Arafat. The Mosque in Madinah was the place where he

197 Safi-ur-Rahman, 1996, pp 350 - 360

usually taught, besides other mosques. His Friday sermons from the pulpit were a regular feature. Sometimes there were special gatherings for specific purposes (like study circles for the Qur'an, collection of alms etc). As a guest, he taught in the houses of his hosts too.

Teaching during War

The different wars the Prophet engaged in also provided settings for his teachings. He taught his Companions during the preparations for war (like digging trenches in the battle of Khandaq). He gave guidelines to his soldiers on what to do and what not to do during wars that are relevant even today. He had addressed them after victory (after the Conquest of Makkah) as well as after defeat (Uhud) and even while dividing the war booty.

Graveyard too, a Place for Teaching

Journeys (such as the Tabuk expedition) and resting places (during *Hijrah*; migration to Madinah) too provided the Prophet with settings for his teachings. Even the graveyard was a familiar setting for his teaching. Special mention must be made about his teaching during a solar eclipse, on the day he lost his only son. Even during his last days on his deathbed, he was constantly teaching. All these episodes occurred in Makkah, Madinah and their surroundings.

COMPARISON AS TEACHERS – MUHAMMAD AND JESUS

Both Muhammad's and Jesus' actions and words characterize them as teachers. Generally, Muhammad was frequently addressed as 'Prophet' whereas Jesus was addressed as 'teacher'. However, there are many explicit mentions indicating his role as a teacher, such as: "I am here to answer your questions", "preaching", "addressing in loud voice", "praying for knowledge", "convey the knowledge", "selecting a suitable time (for teaching)", "facilitate and do not make it hard", "comprehend", "learn and teach others", "to memorize", "recognize and remember", "repeating", "write", "keep quiet and

help us to understand the conditions and circumstances under which Jesus started his career as a teacher in comparison with Muhammad. This is followed by a survey, which depicts the changes produced in individuals and society by the teachings of these two historic teachers. The final part describes the contemporaneous effects of their teaching and compares them.

Palestine before Jesus in Comparison with Arabia before Muhammad

Palestine is the territory along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea traditionally known as the land of the Bible. Broadly described, Palestine is bounded on the north by the foothills of the Anatolian Plateau, on the south by the Sinai desert, on the east by the Euphrates and on the west by the Mediterranean Sea. The Arabian Peninsula is bounded by Palestine and Syrian Desert on the north; the Euphrates, Tigris and the Persian Gulf on the east; by the Indian Ocean on the south; and by the Red Sea on the west. Both Arabia and Palestine are adjacent to each other. Although Palestine was insignificant in size and poor in natural resources, its strategic location made it a vital region. It was a land bridge for two continents and a crossroad for several nations. Armies and caravans traversed Palestine for centuries. Its geographical position immersed it in the political, commercial, cultural and military activities of the whole region. Its strategic location also made it vulnerable. At the same time, Arabia is much larger in size compared to Palestine but its natural isolation with only desert life protected it against invasion. Earlier Palestine was ruled by a succession of conquerors namely the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and the Romans. Except for Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula was literally unknown to the ancient world⁵⁸⁸.

Deuteronomy describes Palestine as "a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates [...] a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper."⁵⁸⁹ The economy of

588 King, 2002, pp. 740, 741 and Haykal, 1976, pp. 8, 9
589 8:8-9

Palestine was basically agricultural and pastoral. However, the vast expanse of Arabia is utterly uncultivable. It does not have a single river or a dependable rainy season around which any agriculture could be organized. With the exception of fertile and rainy Yemen in the south west, the peninsula consists of plateaus, valleys and deserts and an atmosphere in which no civilization could prosper. In the Old Testament the most famous and prosperous part of Palestine was the Northern kingdom known as Samaria. It is the geographical centre of Palestine. Judah was the Southern kingdom ruled by the Davidic kings. In Greek and Roman times (333 B. C. to 324 C. E.) this was called Judea. Jerusalem was the capital city of the southern region. The Jordan river flows down the middle of the Rift valley which splits the country down the middle⁵⁹⁰. In Arabia, Makkah and Ka'bah, the temple Prophet Ishmael built was the object of pilgrimage ever since Arab history began. Hence, Makkah was considered as the capital of Arabia⁵⁹¹. Other small towns that grew up along the caravan routes were Ta'if and Yathrib (Madinah).

The Political History of the Jews in Palestine and the Arabs in Arabia

Based on the Biblical traditions, we come to know that Jerusalem remained the center of Jewish sovereignty and of Jewish worship so long as the Jews exercised sovereignty over the country up to the Jewish revolt in 133 C. E*. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans ruled Israel and Judea. After Alexander's death, one of his generals Seleucus founded a dynasty that gained control of much of Palestine about 200 C.E. At first, the new rulers called Seleucids allowed the practice of Judaism. But later, one of the kings, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 C. E.) of Syria tried to make the Israelites adopt Greek customs and language, but to no avail. He made a determined effort to exterminate the people and their religion.

590 Philip J. King, Harper's Bible Dictionary, 2002, p. 740

591 Haykal, 1976, p. 21

*Bar Kokhba's Revolt {132 – 135 CE} against Roman Empire, also known as "The Second Jewish Roman War" or "The Second Roman Revolt" was a second major rebellion by the Jews of Ludaea